

When Jesus returns to Nazareth, a place where he is well known, the villagers think they know all about him from the time he grew up there. They know his family and they have certain expectations. They don't necessarily know what Jesus has been doing since the time of his Baptism and although they have heard about some of his miracles, they have yet to hear directly about the Kingdom of God.

Just prior to this hometown visit, Jesus was pleasantly surprised by the faith of those who came to him for healing. The woman who touched his cloak approached Jesus in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction" (Mk 5:33-34). Jairus, the synagogue official also believed in Jesus' ability to save and he pleads for help on behalf of his daughter. Jesus calms his fears, encourages him in his faith and heals his daughter.

In Nazareth, Jesus teaches in the synagogue and is surprised by their lack of faith. He is more than a carpenter. He is building the Kingdom of God. He is the cornerstone, laying down the foundation for a new understanding of God. Jesus is the beloved Son of God who "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Ph 2:7-8)

The humble Jesus runs into the pride of his hometown people who are stuck in the past and not willing to look at the changing times. They are impressed by his miracles, but they question his wisdom. Jesus is calling them to a profound new way of life, but they cannot move beyond the old ways of family, ethnicity, and the long history of shared spiritual experience.ⁱ

- "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Mt 5:21-22).
- "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (5:27-28).
- "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.' But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God's throne" (5:33-34).

The people of Nazareth had a hard time accepting this. "They could not see that Jesus' association with them called them to transcend their own identity and join him in a new relationship, based not on family but on doing the will of God."ⁱⁱ

We do not live in first century Nazareth, but we struggle with our own issues of faith. Where the people of old could not accept something new, we live in a time of such great and constant change, that we have difficulty accepting the faith as it has been handed on from Jesus to the Apostles down to the present day. We are all too willing to accept change to suit our own fickle belief system.

- Today, many Catholics do not believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In June, the US bishops gathered virtually to discuss how to foster a deeper appreciation for the beauty and mystery of the Eucharist, how it unites us as the body of Christ, and how we should best prepare ourselves for its celebration and reception.ⁱⁱⁱ The dialogue is ongoing on how best to do this. Let us never forget, Jesus teaches "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51).
- From the time of Adam and Eve, the sabbath has always been a sacred day to rest from work and to contemplate God's love for us. Catholic Churches have seen a great decline in Mass

attendance. It is bigger than any recent impact from the coronavirus and crosses over denominational lines. The sabbath is a gift to us. Gathering as a community for Mass helps us understand that the Eucharist has both an individual and social dimension. We come together as the People of God to worship with one heart and voice.^{iv}

- With the 4th of July weekend, we are reminded of the founding principles of the nation as laid out in the Declaration of Independence. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” What was self-evident in 1776, is declared oppression and injustice in 2021. In a very divided nation over the issue of abortion, the right to life is no longer seen as a God given right that cannot be taken away. Has eternal truth changed, or are we so wrapped up in a personal world view that we no longer hold God given truths to be self-evident?

Jesus calls us to transcend our secular identity and our personal values to join him in a much more profound and enduring relationship based on doing the will of God.

This past week, the Focus Missionaries helped our parish in Fairbanks to host a regional Vacation Bible School. Before the children arrived for morning Mass, the young adults spent an hour in prayer with Eucharistic Adoration. They spent time listening. On one morning in which I was able to join them, I recall entering the Holy Hour with deep and pressing concerns. I was hoping for enlightenment from God. Instead of my concerns, Jesus lay his own on my heart helping me to recognize that his concerns were of greater importance than my own. “In the Eucharist, we encounter Christ in a very personal way. This encounter has the power to transform us, sending us and the entire body of Christ on mission to transform our world in His name.”^v

Jesus often withdrew in prayer to listen to his Father and to seek his guidance. If we are to build up the Kingdom of God and increase our own faith, we too need to spend more time in silence listening to the quiet voice of truth leading us to everlasting life.

ⁱ LaVerdiere, Eugene. *The Beginning of the Gospel (of Mark)*, 141.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kettler, Bp Donald. stcdio.org/2021/06/25/bishop-kettler-my-hopes-for-a-teaching-document-on-the-eucharist/

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Ibid.